I: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

APPENDIX VI

A NOTE ON THE LEPCHA LANGUAGE

104 194 Since I am no philologist, the following notes can only be of very slight value. I am giving them chiefly to account for my principle of transliteration.

Lepcha is said (Linguistic Survey of India) to belong to the Tibetan-Burman group of languages. It is non-pronominalised and not tonal. It is fundamentally a monsyllabic language, as was recognised in the alphabet invented by King Chador. This alphabet consists of 56 signs—the initial vowel a, 37 initial consonants, 10 vowels, indicated by diacritic marks, and 8 final consonants, also indicated by diacritic marks, with the result that each initial consonant with its diacritic marks represents a syllable and most usually a word. The initial consonants are: k, kl, kh, g, gl, ng, ch, chh, j, ny, t, th, d, n, p, pl, ph, f, fl, b, bl, m, ml, ts, tsh, z, y, r, l, h, hl, v, s, sh, w. TH and PH are aspirated (as in English hothouse) and J is always pronounced as in French *jamais*; otherwise the consonants (with the exception of the initial NG which has no equivalent in Western European languages) are pronounced much the same as in English. The final consonants are k, ng, t, n, p, r, l, m. The chief difficulty in transliteration has been the vowel sounds; the alphabet has ten vowel signs, long and short a, e, i, o, u: but, apart from the nuisance of employing diacritic marks in every word, Lepcha has a greater number of vowel sounds than this, and I have therefore used dipthongs, especially to represent the varied O and U sounds. I have employed the following combinations of letters:

a	as in hat
aa	„ balm, Haag (Dutch)
ah	„ ah! bas (French)
au	„ autumn
e	„ bet
é	„ make, été (French)
ee	„ beat
i	„ pit
i not followed by a consonant	„ sea
o	„ pot
oa	„ boat
oh	„ cocoa
oo	„ book
ou	„ you
u	„ but
u not followed by a consonant	„ Hugh, hue
eu	„ peu (French)
ü	„ über (German)
'	„ petit (French) behave.

212 114 designed it from the Tibetan and Nepalese forms of the Indian alphabet. It imperfectly represents many of the Lepcha sounds, and especially so in its romanized equivalents as given by Mr. MAINWARING, in his grammar above mentioned. This was particularly noticeable when I took down the spoken words directly from the lips of the identical men who had been Mr. MAINWARING's chief informants. Their pronunciation of many of the words differed considerably from his record, especially in the vowel sounds. Mr. M. himself partially admitted to me this difference, when I confronted him with these men; but he excused himself by alleging that none of the Lepchas knew their own language properly, and he added, when he kept a school for Lepchas at Darjeeling, he never could get them to pronounce their own words aright!

114 194 Indeed, it was evident that the enthusiastic Mr. MAINWARING, in addition to arbitrarily altering the Lepcha language, and subordinating the actual facts to his theories on the subject, did not distinguish clearly many of the common vowel sounds. [1]) To express however by any system of transliteration the rich vowel sounds of the soft Lepcha speech with its melodious cadences is extremely difficult. Most of the vowels are clearly diphthongs and triphthongs [2]), so much so as to suggest the possibility that they represent contracted forms of longer words from which some of the consonants may have dropped out in the wear and tear of use through many ages, when unfixed by writing. Little phonetic decay, however, seems to have occurred during the past 180 years or so, judging from the written forms found in the first Lepcha book, which appeared under the hybrid Tibetan-title, the *Tashe-sung* and which is believed to have been composed about that date [3]), certainly not earlier.

194 Moreover, it does not seem to have been recognised that the Lepcha speech is distinctly tonic, abounding in homonyms, one word having a variety of meanings according to the tone in which it is uttered. These tones I have not attempted to indicate here, as I have not had time to study the language in sufficient detail for this purpose. And in view of the comparatively recent introduction of the so-called alphabet, I have preferred instead of this latter to give here the spoken forms, in the roman character, as noted down phonetically by myself according to the generally recognized system of transliteration [4]); altough I also give the written text of the songs for reference.

192 The poverty of words in the Lepcha language in striking, but not more than one would expect in the language of such primitive people. Their scanty stock of verbal-roots

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[1]) Thus the word for 'a good spirit', which is clearly pronounced by the Lepchas as *Rām* or *Rāfam*, was not only spelt, but pronounced by Mr. M. as '*Rum*' or '*Room*'. Again *Tak* or *Tsak* 'the head' is never pronounced *Tak* or *T'yak* as spelt by Mr. M. Nor is *Pun-di* 'a queen' ever pronounced *Pundi*, which only obscures its etymological relationship to *Pun-so* 'a king'. Similarly *Kup* 'young', *Sak-dam*, 'world', *Sa-mū* 'a bear', *Maen* or *Mān* 'flesh-meat', *L'o* a 'cool hill', above about 7,000 feet elevation, *Kyung-a* hamlet, 'flo-ber' a musk-deer; *Pak-d'ok*, 'a jungle', *Yak-man* 'a Lama', are never pronounced *Kup*, *Suk-dum*, *Sa-mo*, *Mān*, *Hlo*, *Kyung*, *So-bur*, *Pak-sūk*, *Yuk-man*, as given by Mr. M.

[2]) Thus the word for 'a spirit' seems to be often pronounced *Raefim*'.

[3]) The general nature of this and some other Lepcha books were first indicated by me (in Gazetteer of Sikhim 1894, p. 298; and Buddhism of Tibet London 1895 p. 106). A chapter of this booklet has been published with a Tibetan and German translation in the Toung-Pao (1896) by Professor GRÜNWEDEL, who has shown that it contains a version of the *Sapphra Jātaka*. It teems however with Tibetan words and the Sikhimese forms of the latter. Nor can its authority for particular forms of words be taken too strictly, for it was never printed, and none of its extant manuscript copies are perhaps very old. Indeed most of these have been written by pupils of Mr. MAINWARING himself.

[4]) is generally the same as that adopted by the Royal Asiatic Society of London, except for the letter ā, and ch for c.

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101 192 tion to the word 'Mother' is interesting, because customs are to be found amongst the Lepchas which appear to be vestiges of the primitive-social institution of Matriarchy or the mother-ship of clans; whilst this institution still flourishes amongst their co-related tribes in the neighbouring Garo-hills, who trace their descent through their mothers and not 192 through their fathers. Thus, as apparent vestiges of matriarchy amongst the Lepchas, I 581 find still surviving the usage of female suitorship, in which the young woman proposes marriage by offering to the man selected a basket of eggs; personal inclination in the choice of a husband; monogamy as a rule only relaxed in case the wife proves barren, [551] tribal endogamy, avoidance of girl's mother, and not unfrequent Teknonymy whereby the father is called after his child — thus the father of Tak-li-ap (*Tak-li-ap bo*). Moreover all the tribal groups (*a-git*), of which there are several scores, bear the affix 'mother' 103 (*mo*) [1], although the proper name in this group title is territorial, the name of a particular 192 valley or glen or hillside; and their grouping is itself merely territorial and has no significance as to marriage or true tribal division. Instances of such groups are 'The Wormwood mother' (*Tak-ñel-mo*), for the locality of this hamlet is exceptionally overgrown with wormwood; 'The Foot mother' (*Sang-dyang-mo*): this hamlet is one of the very few which lies at the *foot* of the tropical forge of the Tista-river; 'the Stockade mother' (*Tung-sung-mo*) this village near Darjiling occupies the site of an old stockade; 'the sloping-field mother' (*Ding-tam-mo*), 'the Namchi mother' (*Nam tsii-mo*), and thus we also have 'the Darjiling mother' for those born at Darjiling (*Darjeling-mo*). The only group of the tribe, 101 it may be added, which does not bear this affix of 'mother' is the highest section or 192 *A-den-pan-tso* [2]) from which, as its name denotes, the kings (*Pano*) and the ministers (*A-den*) used to be drawn — now however its members have a preponderating strain of Tibetan blood.

192 As instances of others of these archaic words and phrases whose meanings have been forgotten by the Lepchas, but which seem to me to be apparently of a descriptive character, may be cited the words and phrases qualifying 'fields' and 'world', namely '*Ku-ran-mik*' and '*zor*'. In the former the words literally read 'bosom-stone-below', which would read 'the fields on the bosom of stone underneath.' The prefix *Ku* also is used for 'clothes', with the same meaning as Tibetan '*gö*' (goe) a coat, and *gur*, a tent, in either case would give the sense of 'the fields clothing the bosom of the stones'. Whilst the word joined to 'world' means 'rain' (*so* or *se*, which is literally applicated to the Lepcha part of the world as it is one of the rainiest sites on the globe; but probably it also meant originally the rain of the eyes or *tears*, and was perhaps thus used by the weary toiling Lepcha in the pessimistic sense of 'tearful world'.

● [194] The homonymic character of the language also, would suggest the possibility that some of these archaic words are descriptive as in the tonic Chinese and Burmese, such as 'the *flat-thing* plate', 'the *round-thing* bottle' etc. It is to be hoped that this interesting question will be pursued by philologists.

776 The spirits and deities of the tribe are referred to in these songs, and require a little description, as they show the primitive conception of the Lepchas in regard to God, and the deification of natural objects and of their ancestors. The Lepcha gods and godlings are

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[1]) Not *Mung* as stated by Mr. Risley (loc. cit. IV. Appendix 89); this word means 'devil'.
[2]) The affix *tso* is interpreted as 'stock or lineage'.